

# **Le Coup du parapluie starring Bub and Bob**

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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Parasol Stars. You know the one, it's "The Story of Bubble Bobble III", or is it "The Story of Rainbow Islands II"? Yes! Which? Both! What?!?



According to the PC Engine original it's the former, though ask Ocean who ported it to the Amiga, Atari ST, NES and Game Boy and they'll tell you it's sometimes the former and sometimes the latter depending on the platform in question and whether you're looking at the box or the title screen. Confused yet? I'm just getting started!

The NES and Game Boy boxes each state it's RI2, while the title screen insists it's BB3. On the other hand, the Amiga and ST ports both believe it's RI2, and the boxes and title screens concur. The PC Engine edition is equally consistent (internal logic-wise I should add), yet tries to convince us that Parasol Stars is actually BB7. Only joking - Working Designs who developed the original for Taito are certain the correct subtitle is BB3. Of all the things you'd imagine might have been lost in translation, who'd have put money on our

hero's hairdos? Wako me up before you go-go. 'Cause I'm not plannin' on playin' solo.

But wait! We're *still* not finished. This being a Japanese game of arcade heritage, the lunacy continues with Taito's 1995 follow-up, Bubble Memories, which they - wait for it - refer to as "The Story of Bubble Bobble III" as if to totally denounce the existence of Parasol Stars. You see, in a sense it *doesn't* exist, not as a coin-op title in any case... or *does* it? No-one seems to know for sure. It's a befuddled conundrum tripping over a monster bundle of perplexity swept under an extremely lumpy rug.

What we *do* know is that the PC Engine incarnation *did* and *does* exist, and all subsequent ports used this as the font of progenitation. Is that clear now? ...Hello? ...*Hello*? You've already closed your browser and gone off to dig out that noose you keep for special occasions like this, haven't you? I'll continue regardless if only for my own amusement.

Courtesy of the manual, the featherweight plot looks a lot like this...

## **The story so far...**

After rescuing the inhabitants of Rainbow Islands in their last hair-raising adventure, Bub and Bob are enjoying a well-earned vacation. However, their peace is shattered when the warmongering warrior Chaostikahn unleashes a magma of menacing monsters throughout the universe.

With their magic parasols in hand (gifts from the grateful Rainbow Islanders) Bub and Bob must defeat the monsters and free the universe.

Bub and Bob depart from Rainbow World to take on the monsters of seven wildly differing planets.

Whilst technically a direct sequel to Rainbow Islands (don't start that again for Blubba's sake!), this largely one screen platforming affair shares more in common with Bubble Bobble. The simultaneous two-player option makes a welcome comeback allowing you to either collaborate with, or compete against a partner in clearing each screen of opponents. Unlike Parasol Star's predecessor (chronologically speaking!), this is your core focus in that it's a prerequisite to advancing to the next stage and between planets, or 'stars' as they are referred to here. \*Honk!\* Title exposition ahoy! \*honk!\*



*Hey Mick, don't suppose you have any quirky trivia I could use to spice up my review? "One day I'd noticed Don had added his initials to the world loading screen, so I added mine too. MIK"*

Fail to achieve this briskly enough and the invincible 'hurry up' Gaiko ghosts emerge, wasting no time in harassing you

to the brink of your sanity, a reverential throwback to Bubble Bobble we could live without. An alternative 'timer without the clock' mechanism can be found in Rainbow Islands where it's the rising damp you need to outrun.

Your universe consists of eight planets, each broken into seven distinct levels, plus three secret bonus stars, one of which *didn't* feature in the PC Engine source material - a dash of medieval artistic license from the talented Ocean development team who translated the game to the Amiga and Atari ST. In accord with Parasol's penchant for skimming the cream from each of its forbears, a giant boss battle ensues following every seventh level a la Rainbow Islands, and following suit, some of them are harder than an Adamantium rottweiler!



*Golden Axe called. It wants its Turtle Village back!*

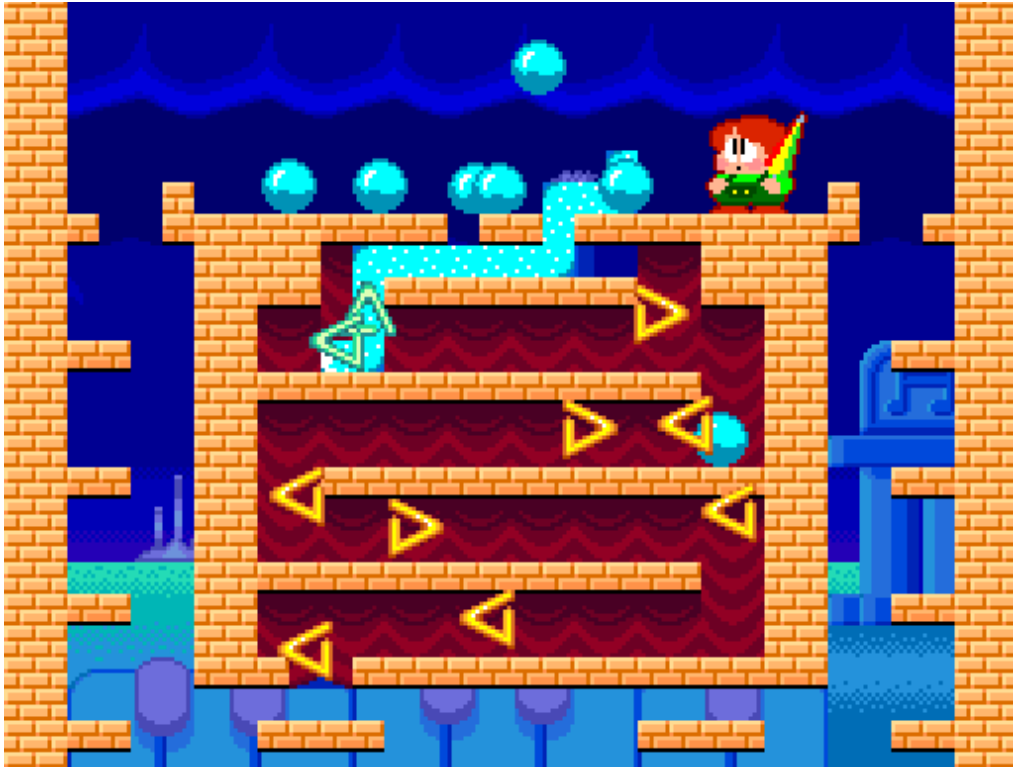
Armed with an umbrella (or parasol if you live alongside a riviera and are a bit poncey), three lives and two continues,

you begin your intergalactic crusade. Your incredibly versatile parasol can be employed in a plethora of diverse situations...

- As a shield, parachute, or makeshift platform for the second player to climb on.
- To generate or catch water droplet projectiles.
- In hoisting aloft baddies (or even the second player) to be hurled into their chums.
- By treating it as a substitute sword, swiping at opponents to incapacitate them.
- Pitching a projectile across the screen at collectables serves as an efficient alternative to walking into them.
- Some people claim umbrellas can even keep you dry in a rain shower! Lunatics.

Once you've accumulated five broolly balancing bubbles, a far more potent mega-bubble is formed. These fall into one of four categories.

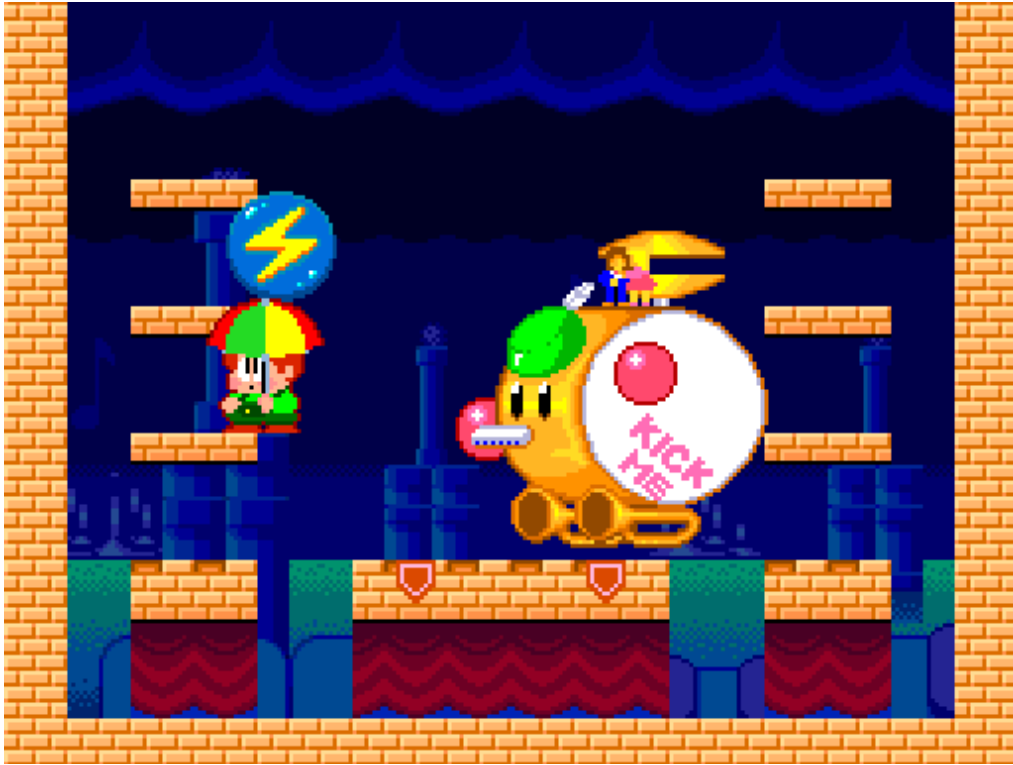
Water bombs when broken release a torrent of the wet stuff, which cascades downwards following the route of least resistance, flushing out anything in its path, you included if you're not careful.



*Which reminds me, I must remember to book that colonic irrigation session.*

Fire bubbles split apart littering the ground with napalm flame droplets that inflict severe damage to anything unlucky enough to attempt to walk through this death trap. Note that you're not immune to these either since they're a tad hot... obviously.

Flung mega-bubble lightning bolts (as opposed to the smaller ones that look just the same) hurtle across the screen horizontally, whereas the stars emitted from their enveloping superbubbles spiral outwards filling the playfield with deadly satellites.



*Well, it would be rude not to since it asked so politely.*

All special weapons aside from the latter are lifted directly from Bubble Bobble, just in case you happen to need a reminder of Parasol's roots. That said, the star-spangled special weapon is highly reminiscent of the one-off star detonators found in Rainbow Islands.

However you choose to dispatch your adversaries, they must first be stunned and then booted off-screen to finish the job. Forget and they reanimate, bounding back at you with twice the agility and vehemence... as you would if someone tried to bury *you*. 'Sometimes They Come Back' so you might like to keep an eye open for the disguised recurring foes you encounter in later stages.





*Relevant picture pending. Nappy-ed up pink elephant anyone? Cyclops troll? There's just no pleasing some people.*

The obligatory point-chasing element common to Taito coin-ops is as conspicuous as ever, though it's only critical to completing the game in that it's key to boosting your life count, and you'll need as many as you can lay your stubby paws on to make any progress.

Food pick-ups are worth between 10 and 100,000 points (for the supersized ones, including the WcDonalds fries as seen in Rainbow Islands - although is that technically 'food'?), while launching minions into one another will rack up a cumulative figure, doubling with each additional kill, beginning at 2000 and maxing out at 100,000 points. You are awarded an extra life upon collecting 100,000 points, and further lives are earned following accrual of 1,000,000

points. Much more efficacious, however, collecting the '100 coin' will grant you an instant extra credit.



*Taito plunge feet-first into didactic stealth mode. That strawberry must be worth at least 11 of my 5 a day!*

Aside from point bonuses, various special power-ups can be exploited to super-charge your abilities. Magic shoes (which look more like Christmas present stockings) double your velocity, hearts and crooks result in more collectable food appearing at the end of the level, power hearts bolster your firepower for a limited period, clocks freeze everything on screen allowing you to lay into them with impunity, diamond rings unleash lethal glowing stars, and bombs, well they do what bombs do best.

Again commensurate to the genre, Parasol Stars features hidden doors to three secret planets, switches that reveal hidden bonus items, and multiple finales; the one unveiled for completing the game in a linear fashion, and the true-

proper-genuine ending you're rewarded with if you discover all the hidden areas.

Two of these - as found in the PC Engine as well as Amiga versions - are themed around the Taito classics, Bubble Bobble and Chack'n Pop (Bubble Bobble's 1983 precursor), while the third hidden planet devised by Ocean specifically for the Amiga release embodies a novel 'nightmare' theme.



*Can you spot any Monstas or Mightas? OK, just Chack'n. No need to bite my head off!*

The two original secret planets are accessed on the final visible planet by collecting three equivalent 'miracle icons', whereas the Amiga port's additional planet can be reached through world three - not so coincidentally known as 'Ocean World'.

On level three, collecting the pink heart followed by all the peppers arranged to spell the word 'IN' will transport you to the secret location. There are a lot of them and you're up against the clock so it really helps if you have a partner to help.

Squirrelled away behind any hidden doors you unearth you'll discover a chamber harbouring a special power-up. Grabbing these affects the type, value and frequency of the pick-ups that appear on the subsequent world.

Mick West and Don McDermott were tasked with porting the game from the PC Engine original with minimal support from Taito. The only assets they received for reference were the graphics, half of which could be used as-is, the remainder recreated from scratch so as to be compatible with the Amiga's idiosyncratic specifications. The result is an exceptional effort *before* you consider what an uphill battle they faced - had Parasol Stars been translated from a coin-op PCB you could justifiably brandish the coveted, ethereal 'arcade perfect' stamp and plant it down squarely on the box.



*And Bub swore to his shrink he had his Fyllophobia under control.*

Tightening up the code, Bub and Bob are brought to life courtesy of just seven frames of animation and 32 colours, helping to ensure the frame rate remains optimal despite the prevalence of a melee of often frenetic, congested action. Fast-paced elements are refreshed at an impressive 50 fps, while more sedentary sprites operate at 25 fps. In terms of resource management - the essence of porting games to systems with limited processing power - it really is a wonder to behold.

Mick took on the impossible challenge of making the game uncrackable, and would have earned a tidy bonus had he managed to pull it off successfully. Spending three weeks devising a number of convoluted routines revolving around multiple layers of encryption, checksums and obfuscation to thwart any potential tamperers he was hopeful of a positive

outcome. It wasn't to be - the game was cracked within a week and Mick never received his bonus.

Musicians Keith Tinman and Matthew Cannon took charge of the audio accompaniment, despite the incidence of Jonathan Dunn name-dropping in magazine preview articles. It has since emerged that he worked on Parasol Star's sound driver, though wasn't credited in-game.

The soundtrack is appropriately arcadey, energetic and memorable, though loops swiftly enough to drive you to your local aural lobotomy clinic long before you're ready to switch off the game. Luckily it *can* be muted independently of the sound effects using the plus and minus keys.

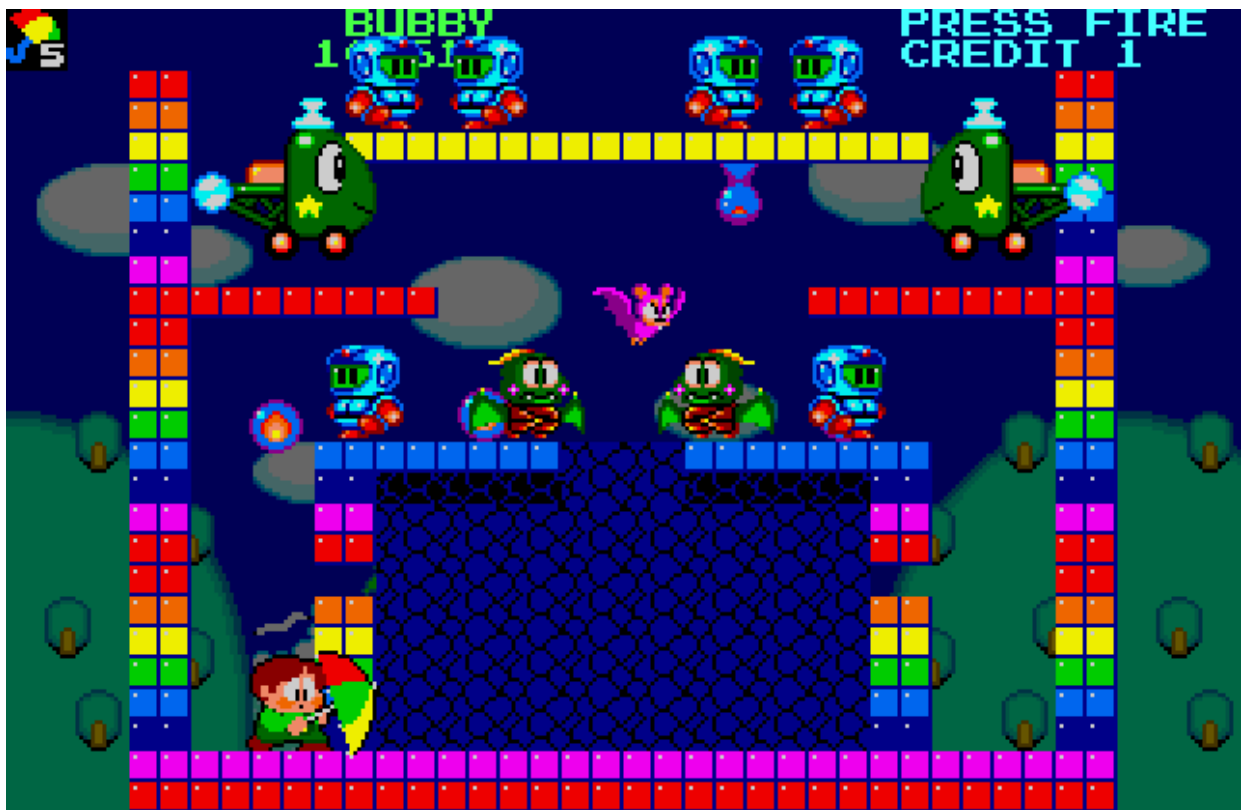
Like Rainbow Islands, Parasol Stars adopts an existing, recognisable track for a portion of its soundtrack. Whenever you engage in a guardian battle, the Lambada by French pop group, Kaoma, kicks in. The syncopated 'forbidden dance' melody blends beautifully as it's sporadic enough so as not to become irritating, and fuels the surreal premise and mechanics of the eccentric game.



*Right, that's the final straw. Illustrations dude, YOU'RE FIRED!!!*

It's unlikely any royalties changed hands for use of the song, not least because Kaomi's 1989 hit record was itself plagiarised from the 1981 song 'Llorando se fue' by the Bolivian group, Los Kjarkas.

This wouldn't be a Taito game if it wasn't bursting at the seams with unsubtle allusions to related games. The most notable would be the entirety of the eighth planet which is themed around Rainbow Islands. Ditto for the ninth and Bubble Bobble. Moreover, Arkanoid and Space Invaders characters feature prominently in the latter too.



*Two hearts lie in shambles and oh how they've cried, That's what happens when two worlds collide.*



In typical Japanese double-whammy style, the game's swansong is a duel encounter, first with a dark Mighta guardian, swiftly followed by your arch-nemesis, Mr Chaosmonger himself. The Taito trope spotters amongst you might say the first embodiment is the ultimate boss and the second the true-proper ultimate boss.

The curtain closes on a greenbelt scene populated by a familiar encore of the cast, Ocean thank us for playing and the credits roll.



*The strangest intergalactic curtain call you'll never see.*

Parasol Stars was initially intended to also make an appearance on the SNES, Commodore 64 and Spectrum. We at least now know why the C64 port didn't materialise - Colin Porch's ex-wife destroyed the master disks in a drunken rage, eviscerating the developer's work in progress along with any backups. Not to worry, it was all OK in the end because she regretted it.



Early explanations revolving around a burglary incident were revealed to be no more than an exercise in saving embarrassment, or to ward off complaints from the C64 owners who were chomping at the bit to get hold of the game following glowing reviews of the demo.

With regards to the other games that weren't, I asked Amiga coder, Mick West, if he knew what became of the proposed SNES and Spectrum ports...

"I'm afraid I don't remember any more than you would have read online. Ocean were kind of dropping out of doing Spectrum games at the time so it was not a high priority. But don't really remember much about SNES development at Ocean. I left Ocean in 1993."

Parasol Stars underwent a minor resurgence in 2008 when it was released for the Wii Virtual Console, though unfortunately only in Japan where they replace proper English wordage with funny alien symbols that make no sense whatsoever. Crazy foreigners.

CU Amiga awarded our 1992 port with a 95% bottom line, Steve Merrett hailing it "an easy contender for game of the year".

Marcus Dyson of Amiga Format wasn't quite as enamoured in that he thought it was "nothing new", yet still declared Parasol Stars "a masterful reworking of Bubble Bobble and Rainbow Islands", dishing up a respectable 87% final grade.

Other critics were similarly enthusiastic, though the thread running throughout the game's reception was a reticence to mark it above its predecessor, Rainbow Islands, which had previously been heralded as no. 1 on Amiga Power's annual All-Time Top 100 list. Overall it received an average score of

83% split across a total of 18 reviews according to the Hall of Light database.

Personally I'd go out on a limb in saying Parasol Stars is *better* than Rainbow Islands. It has the critical instant pick up and play factor, yet its dungarees are roomy enough to evolve into as you master the intricacies of the game's hidden depths and your trusty broly, a facilitator far more functional than the rainbows deployed in Bubble Bobble II.

Neither should the impact of the simultaneous two-player option be underestimated in ratcheting up the longevity, or that the rewards and responsiveness of the controls are that much more immediate. It's an altogether more fluid coin-op style game, even *without* the eternal threat of flooding.

There's no escaping that this is Bubble Bobble rehashed for the next generation, nonetheless it's executed with such zany panache and enough innovative tweaks to the gameplay mechanics for that not to matter.

How is it possible *not* to fall for a game that allows you to duke it out with a Las Vegas showgirl riding a one-armed bandit sleigh towed by My Little Unicorn? That breaks the bizarre-o-metre *before* mentioning her chosen weapons are cleavage-projected flyers ...or are they banknotes? Why would a stripper be throwing money at *us*? Perhaps it's more appropriate that it doesn't make sense. It's a Japanese game after all.



*The strangest intergalactic curtain call you'll never see.*

There's often a fine line between genius and insanity, which is perfectly OK by me when it's this much fun to teeter along it, broly at the ready, staring down the barrel of a loaded pot plant mallard.



*Sink or swim, sometimes it's just pot duck!*